

Ascension of the Lord
May 8, 2016
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Reflection

Sometimes people are told that they're walking with their heads in the clouds. They say it as a criticism. It means they're not practical; they're not focussed on the duty of the moment; they're distracted and perhaps unreliable. But a Christian does have his head in the clouds. We are citizens of heaven, even if we're exiled from it by suffering and sin. Our feet are planted on the earth but our gaze is fixed upwards, with hope, longing and expectation. We're in two worlds: mired on earth but reaching to heaven. We have a sense of this division within our own identities. As citizens of an immigrant nation, our heritage is mixed. We look back at our ancestors and bear the ethnicity that we inherit. If asked, "what are you?" we reply something like "half French, a quarter Hungarian, and a quarter Metis, with a bit of Scottish mixed in." But if we're travelling in a foreign country, we'll say that we're Canadian: an expansive identity that recognizes a broader unity. "That is where I come from; this is what I am." A monarchist will say that he's a member of the commonwealth; an even broader identity that ties him to nations around the world, sharing ideals of law and governance. Some might say they're humanist, thinking that this flattens the distinctions with equity. But really, they're isolating themselves from God and hope. The broadest identity is that of Christian.

Acts 1:1-11
Ps 47
Eph 1:17-23 or Heb 9:24-28; 10:19-23
Lk 24:46-53

It ties us to what is spiritual, eternal and everlasting; it looks past what is material, temporal and corruptible; it ties us to God, makes us the priests of creation, and joins us to the creator who is love.

The words of the gospel remind us of this transcendence; how Jesus makes us more than what we are. "Jesus said to the disciples, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you." The words were sounds that landed on the ears of his disciples. For a non-believer they're worth nothing more than the snap, crackle and pop of a bowl of cereal. Luke doesn't even record them, and maybe he couldn't: they were charged with grace, waiting to be revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Church. And look at their effect! "He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." The words themselves were blown by the wind and lost in time. But the disciples finally understood why Christ came and how to respond. They were converted, and believed more deeply. The words primed the disciples to witness the ascension, to receive the Holy Spirit, and to spread the Gospel and the Church. "You will be baptized by the Holy Spirit not many days from now...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And what did the disciples witness at the ascension?

The first reading says, "he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." The gospel says, "He withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven." The ascension remains a mystery that we cannot fully understand, but with truths we can know.

First, after the ascension, he is seated at the right hand of God. This is more than a figure of speech. He is seated **bodily** at the right hand of God, with a glorified humanity. Through the ascension, he brought humanity into heaven; he brought humanity into the Trinity. And now the Trinity can enter humanity, through the sacraments. The Holy Spirit brings the divinity of God into our hearts, making us children of God.

Second, at the ascension, Jesus went to heaven before us. He leads us so that we can follow "by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh." But already we are citizens of heaven. Our passports say "Canada," but the Holy Spirit gives us a glimpse of our true homeland at each Eucharist. The psalm says, "God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." We see Jesus lifted up at Mass and carried home to the sound of bells. We follow him when we receive communion. This is especially true when we "approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith...sprinkled clean from an evil conscience."

Finally, we know that Jesus intercedes for us from the throne. He prays for us in our joys and sufferings, and is with us through his mystical body, the Church. Remember that the Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son.

The intercession of Jesus to the Father, and the Father giving all to the Son, is the outpouring of the same Holy Spirit. It's permanent and never ending. It brings God to us, and us closer to God. Through this exchange, the reign of Christ in the kingdom of God is present on earth, like a seed in the ground. But it will only be fulfilled at his return. Now we have distress and trial, waiting and watching. These will be transformed into justice, love and peace. So for this Eucharist, "let us hold fast to our hope without wavering," knowing that Jesus will come again.